

Theresa Stern: Welcome to Central Bark, a podcast from Guide Dogs for the Blind. I'm Theresa Stern, and I'm your host. Hello, and welcome to Central Bark. Today, I am super excited to introduce you to award-winning filmmaker and longtime guide Dogs for the Blind friend, Dana Nachman. Dana and I are going to chat a little bit today about Pick of the Litter, the series and the documentary, which was, of course, about Guide Dogs for the Blind, and also learn a little bit about her new project, Dear Santa. So welcome. Dana, we're so excited to have you here.

Dana Nachman: Thank you so much. How are you? I miss you.

Theresa Stern: I know. We miss having you around. So tell everybody a little bit about your connection to Guide Dogs for the Blind, like how you got involved with doing Pick of the Litter and shows about GDB.

Dana Nachman: Sure. I just don't even remember what the first little nugget was, but I had heard about it somehow, probably from all the great marketing and press you guys do. My partner, Don Hardy, and I were so just excited to learn more about it. We worked at NBC Bay Area. It wasn't called NBC Bay Area at the time, whatever it was, the NBC station. My job was a special projects producer, so I got to really have a lot of ownership and pick of what stories I did, mostly features. So I pitched a story on it. I believe it was about the puppy raiser. Oh. No, no. I think the first one was about a graduation, and that ... I mean, you can't have a dry eye if you're at a graduation, and so we-

Theresa Stern: No kidding.

Dana Nachman: Oh my God. I mean, so we did that, and then being there, we learned about, kind of a little bit about the process. I mean, of course, at the time, we thought we knew a lot about the process, but now we know a lot about the process. So we did another story. It was around the holidays, actually. I remember, because there was Christmas lights everywhere. Then, we had to hold it for a few months, and then it was really awkward that there was Christmas lights. But we did those about puppy raisers and what that job was.

Then, we did another one about a woman who had a guide dog. She worked at Guide Dogs. I don't even remember who it was, and she had some very interesting hobbies. We did one on them. So we just did a lot of stories. Whenever we could find an angle, we did a story. Then, we became, over the years, we kind of morphed from being journalists to being filmmakers, and there's always a lot of nuggets that we learned from being journalists. One that kind of stuck out was the whole process of raising a guide dog, and meanwhile, my mom had done a story in New York, a similar story about raising guide dogs from birth to if they make it for a newspaper in New York.

Theresa Stern: Oh. Cool.

Dana Nachman: I thought that was a great idea, and I'm like, "That's an awesome narrative thread for a documentary." So we went over to Guide Dogs for the Blind, and we pitched you guys. You said yes, which was an amazing thing and put us on this amazing many-years-long trajectory to make both the film and the series.

Theresa Stern: Right. Right. That's so cool, the connection with your mom, too. I think that's amazing.

Dana Nachman: She has very good ideas. My mom has very good ideas, like very-

Theresa Stern: Yes she can. That's good.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. She does.

Theresa Stern: So tell us about sort of making that documentary, and about the series, and what sort of the differences were for you.

Dana Nachman: Gosh. I had a very funny, funny experience this morning. So for another reason, I was looking up how many days we shot for the film, and I had estimated it was 40 days. But when I actually looked at it, it was 112 days.

Theresa Stern: No way.

Dana Nachman: It was insane. It was, and just to give you a perspective, when we budget for documentaries and how we make them and plan, we plan for 40 days.

Theresa Stern: Wow.

Dana Nachman: So that was crazy. We shot a lot, and then, for the series, we shot only 82 days. But we were around there, and probably to everybody, who's like ... They're like, "Wait. What did we get involved with? You guys are always around."

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: So the process was really amazing, and it was really an interesting process to make the film. We made it over two years. I mean, wait, shooting, I think, for two years. Yeah. So then, it took longer to make the whole thing, and it was a really amazing process to watch, step by step, these dogs go from birth and the minute they were born-

Theresa Stern: Yes, literally.

Dana Nachman: ... to these amazing helpers and these amazing animals and all the people in between it took to get them there. It was really awesome. So when Disney came calling to make a series based on the film, I mean, they were smart, because it's a great, great, great process. We did it again. But it was way different, because we were working with a big company. Both Don and I, just, basically, the reason

we could do it the other way with a hundred and, what did I say, 112 days was because we were just kind of pop over, shoot for a couple hours. We were local. It was a little more casual, and then when Disney got involved-

Theresa Stern: Brought in the big mouse, it all changed.

Dana Nachman: Much less casual, lots of people, and on a much quicker timeline. They wanted to make it ... I believe we kind of got the green light in January, February, and they needed it done by July. So that precluded us doing it the way we had done it before, from birth through the process. So it was like we were halfway through the process when we started, and it was just pretty chaotic, but really interesting, as well. So we knew so much more. We had more institutional knowledge. We knew you guys much better. It was really fun to get a do-over in a lot of way.

Theresa Stern: That's so cool. Yeah, and it is fun to watch both, because they're similar but very different. So it's kind of, it's a cool experience for the viewers, as well, I think, but-

Dana Nachman: I think so. I hope so. Yeah. I mean, I haven't heard. You guys probably know better, like feedback on which people like better.

Theresa Stern: You know what? Everybody just seems to them both a lot, so ...

Dana Nachman: That's so nice.

Theresa Stern: Was there anything that you were like, "Oh. Shoot. I wish they hadn't"? I imagine you are, I'm sure, part of the editing, but was there anything that you had to edit out just for time or whatever that was like, "Oh. Darn," like-

Dana Nachman: No. I don't think so.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: There's nothing really left that ... Not really, because we were so lucky, actually, on both the projects that there was no real ... Actually, the film or the show that I just finished, which I'll tell you about later, we had to make them 22 minutes and 26 seconds each episode.

Theresa Stern: Oh jeez.

Dana Nachman: The line is really tough, to deal with that. Whereas this, because it was on a streaming service, it was supposed to be around 30 minutes, but it was okay if it was less. It was okay if it was more. I think if it went 10 minutes over, which I think the finale was going longer, we had to get approval to go long, but we got it. So we didn't have to do much.

The one thing I think we wanted to try to shoot, but I forgot why we couldn't, was more of the graduation classes, doing ... which I understand. It's annoying to have film crews at things. It could create some problems. But I think that was one thing I was interested in shooting, is more of the class, but maybe we could do that another time with another.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. Definitely. Definitely.

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: We need a third one, for sure.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. Yes. Let's do it. Let's do it.

Theresa Stern: So you mentioned it. You have a new really cool project called Dear Santa. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Dana Nachman: Sure. So yes. I made a film that came out in 2020 called Dear Santa, and it was about ... Actually, and I think it was thanks to Pick of the Litter, so why I got it done. So I'll tell you about that. So it was an idea I had for about eight years before this, and it was ... I had read a book that my mom, again, got me see everything that-

Theresa Stern: Go moms.

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Go Barbara. So she got me a book a bunch of years ago. She found it at the post office, and it was about what happens to all the letters to Santa after they're mailed. Every year, hundreds of thousands of kids send letters to Santa, and they go into the postal service. They get dealt with by Santa and others. So I had this idea when I read that book. I was like, "Oh. What an amazing documentary." But when I got it, I was still in my dark phase. I was doing a lot of very dark and depressing stuff, really.

It was funny. When I went, met my husband, he was like, "You're such a light person. Why do you do such dark things?" I was like, "I don't know why. I don't know." But I saw the light, and now I don't. And so I just didn't see a path for that kind of documentary. Then, after Pick of the Litter, when we got the green light, right around the time we were getting the green light for the Pick of the Litter series, I had already done a film called Batkid Begins that was a little lighter.

Theresa Stern: Oh yeah. Batkid. Yes.

Dana Nachman: And so with Batkid, and then Pick of the Litter, and then the series happening with Disney+, I was like, "No. I think I have the credibility now to do a family type documentary, which is kind of rare." So I cold-called the United States Postal Service just like I cold-called you guys, and-

Theresa Stern: Did you really?

Dana Nachman: Yeah, and they just-

Theresa Stern: "Guess what? I have an idea."

Dana Nachman: Completely. Literally, that's what I did. It took several rounds of figuring out the right people to go to, and they said yes. And so we made that film in 2020, which was about certain letters that we found and then followed them till how Santa deals with them, how the elves deal with them, and all that. Then, that, when I made that, the funders of it said, "Hey. We really want you to do what you did with that Pick of the Litter movie. We want you to do that, as well, so a film and then a series." I said, "Okay. Let's just see how the film goes first."

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: "See if [inaudible 00:09:37] like it, [inaudible 00:09:39]."

Theresa Stern: "[inaudible 00:09:38] get ahead of ourselves."

Dana Nachman: Yes, and so it happened. So after we did that film, we were able now to make a series that's coming out in December for ABC and Hulu about the same thing, Dear Santa. I didn't actually mention, I think we should mention that you guys are featured in Dear Santa.

Theresa Stern: Oh. That's right.

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Tell us a little bit.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. So we were shooting the series during COVID, and there was no letter-writing events happening anywhere. In the film, we got to go to post offices where kids were writing letters to Santa, and we didn't have any that we could go to. So we had to manufacture some. So I called over to you guys and basically said, "Any chance you guys have some kids you'd want to have a letter-writing event with?" You guys had best letter-writing event with kids in your K9 Buddies program.

Theresa Stern: Oh. Cool.

Dana Nachman: They were so adorable, and they asked for such fun things.

Theresa Stern: Oh my gosh.

Dana Nachman: Some of them had braille writers, which was so cool.

Theresa Stern: That's awesome for people to see that. Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. It was great, and that, so that was great. Then, Jane, who works in your office, she got picked by Santa to be an elf.

Theresa Stern: Oh. No way.

Dana Nachman: And so she is also featured. I won't tell you about the letter that Santa gave her, but she was an elf this year. I don't know if this was her first elfing year or not, but you guys can check in with her on that. But she was an elf, and so-

Theresa Stern: So I need to get her a little hat?

Dana Nachman: Yes.

Theresa Stern: With a little bell?

Dana Nachman: Yes. Yes.

Theresa Stern: Awesome.

Dana Nachman: And so that is in one of our episodes.

Theresa Stern: Oh my gosh. I have a feeling there's going to be lots of Kleenex needed for that one, too.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. It's really, it's very similar to Pick of the Litter. It's like, that people say in Thailand, I think, same, same, but different. It's a lot of people coming together to help someone else, and it's really touching. I mean, I think Guide Dogs for the Blind is different in that it's so much work. It's not like a one ... To raise a puppy and to do all the ... it takes so much, which not everybody can do for various reasons. I mean, the people who do it are saints, the-

Theresa Stern: Yes. They are.

Dana Nachman: Yes. To do Operation Santa through the United States Postal Service really takes very little time, but it's the same thing, somebody just helping another person out.

Theresa Stern: Right, and a huge impact, though.

Dana Nachman: Huge impact.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: The kind of pay it forward-ness of it and the thought that a lot ... Several people have said this, that they got a present from Santa and from people who helped Santa, and they never forgot it, and that down the road, 20, 30, 40 years from that, they sent somebody else help. We have a very compelling scene in the series coming up with some Holocaust survivors who helped a current refugee, and they said, "When we went to London after the Holocaust, and there was clothes that were given to us, we just couldn't believe anybody cared," and were just ... They remembered that all these years later and now are giving Christmas gifts to refugees.

Theresa Stern: Oh my God.

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Oh. You're starting me tearing up. That's just amazing, and the, just to know somebody has your back. Right?

Dana Nachman: Yes.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: And a stranger, and you know-

Theresa Stern: It's not somebody you know. Yeah. Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Totally, and the thing on the film, I mean on the series, well, both is they, sometimes, now, the elves can see what happened because of the film. But otherwise, it goes out into the world, and you'll never meet the person. It just goes in the mail, and it shows up at the house of the kid.

Theresa Stern: Super cool. You've had these great opportunities to work with lots of diversity, and tell me what it feels like to be able to really spotlight some of these just incredible stories.

Dana Nachman: Oh. I mean, it's awesome. I think you guys know, because, right, this is what you do all day-in day-out. It's like being around inspirational people, being around people who are helpers in the world, who are doing right by the world, it just is such a better way to live. Right? So I feel lucky that all I'm doing is piggybacking on what you guys do every day and surrounding myself with it. So it's awesome. I mean, and it's funny. Because when I started doing the lighthearted stuff, I realized ... Even though I thought it was, the other films I did were really important, and I really stand by them, but hard to, it's hard to make them, and then not only make them.

Making it's not that hard, but then you have to go out and talk about them for years to come or forever to come. People always come back and ask you, years later, "Hey. What was God Dogs for the Blind like?" or, "Do a podcast for four years after." You constantly want to talk about it. So it's hard and depressing to talk about bad things all the time, whereas now, you could talk about good things all the time. So I think it's been a real awesome thing for me in my life, and I'm really thankful that places Guide Dogs for the Blind trust me with their stories. It's a hard thing to have films and TV shows made about you. It's scary, I'm sure. So I really appreciate the trust. Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. No. You did an incredible job. You really did, brought out so many, even for me, somebody who's been involved with Guide Dogs for a long time, just bringing out some of the stuff that I don't get to see, and like you said, that amazing sort of connection that you have with somebody whose doing something. They don't know who it's going to. They're putting all this work and effort into something. They're not sure how it's going to ... But it changes the world, and I think that's ... You did an amazing job doing that.

Dana Nachman: Totally. Thank you.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Thank you so much.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. No. I think it's awesome. I mean, I think people, if we have more of this, it's a great kind of leveler for all of what we see in the news that's so bad, and just, let's just keep spreading these good stories. Because there's so much good, and no matter who you are and who you are politically or whatever you're doing, a lot of people do great things. And so if we highlight that, we won't worry as much.

Theresa Stern: It gives balance. Right? Lately, I've been calling the news the noise.

Dana Nachman: Totally. Oh my God. Yeah. So bad.

Theresa Stern: So there's a little balance, which is good. So what's next on your plate?

Dana Nachman: I'm not exactly sure what I'm going to do first, but one thing I'm really excited about is I, for about a year now, have been working with the descendants of Emily Post the etiquette guru from the 1900s. So I have gotten the rights to tell her story, and we just signed with a big production company to do it together, which I have. We haven't announced yet, but we will soon. And so we're going to make the film, the definitive film about Emily Post, her story. She's a fascinating woman, not what you would expect. She wasn't all prim and proper.

Theresa Stern: Oh really?

Dana Nachman: She divorced her cheating husband when nobody got divorced.

Theresa Stern: Oh. Good for her.

Dana Nachman: Yeah. She was a bad you know what.

Theresa Stern: Sassy.

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Yeah.

Dana Nachman: Sassy, and then her family has been carrying on her legacy for a hundred years. They just published their centennial edition of her book. So for a hundred years, they've been revising and revising, making it more modern. Now, they talk about pronouns, and what to do when there's like somebody brings a joint to your house to a party, and mansplaining, and tons of different things. And so they're walking the walk all these years later, and their quest to keep her legacy alive is kind of the through line of that film, and then just modern day etiquette and where we are in civility. And so I'm really excited about that. It's like whenever people ask me what I'm doing, we start talking on this thing about tipping, or da-da-da. It brings up a lot of fun things you could [inaudible 00:16:53] about and think about.

Theresa Stern: Totally. Right. Can you pick up a chicken wing with your fingers, or do you have to cut it off the bone?

Dana Nachman: I think they would say yes. I [inaudible 00:17:01].

Theresa Stern: Okay. Good. Good, because that's-

Dana Nachman: Seriously, like almost every weekend, I have something I want to know from them, and I have to stop myself from texting them all the time. Because I'm sure everybody they know does that. You know?

Theresa Stern: Very cool. Very cool. Well, we were chatting before we actually started the show a little bit, and you revealed kind of a cool thing. Tell us a little bit about the project your son and husband might be getting into.

Dana Nachman: Oh my God. I'm so excited. So my husband and son went to their first Puppy Club meeting in Palo Alto on this Sunday, and they might become puppy raisers if we're so lucky to get approved. And so they learned about greeting behavior on Sunday. They came home and were telling me all about it, and it was like-

Theresa Stern: Oh. That's so cool.

Dana Nachman: It was really awesome. So there's a guide dog in his math class at Mountain View High School, and so I think that that kind of opened the door for him. We're excited.

Theresa Stern: Well, what's so cool is that at some point, somebody will ask him why he got into puppy raising, and I bet he'll somehow wheel it back to mom.

Dana Nachman: I don't know. They did say. I asked if it came up, and he said, "No. We're going incognito."

Theresa Stern: Oh.

Dana Nachman: It was really funny. It was really funny. Yeah. I wonder how long it'll take.

Theresa Stern: Right. I love that.

Dana Nachman: Maybe not at all.

Theresa Stern: Oh my gosh. Well, thank you so much for everything that you're doing, really, for the world, bringing some really joyful stories to the world. Thanks for all that you've done to shed the light on Guide Dogs for the Blind, and I wish you the very, very best with your next project.

Dana Nachman: Thank you, Theresa. We missed you.

Theresa Stern: I can't wait to see Dear Santa. Oh, and tell us how we can catch Dear Santa, because I definitely need to see that.

Dana Nachman: It's going to be on ABC. We don't have the time exactly yet, so they said we should check the local listings wherever you live. So they'll be around the country and then on Hulu after that, and so we're excited.

Theresa Stern: Okay. So that'll probably be in December or-

Dana Nachman: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: November/December?

Dana Nachman: Sometime after December 4th.

Theresa Stern: After December 4th. Okay. Cool. Well, I'm definitely going to be tuning in for sure.

Dana Nachman: Oh. Awesome.

Theresa Stern: Well, thank you so much, Dana, and very, very best of luck to you.

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